

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 04597 01 OF 02 011148Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SSC-01
EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AGRE-00 COME-00 AID-05 /084 W
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O 311403Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2305
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9671
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 4597

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV IN
SUBJECT: THE PM'S CABINET: A HETEROGENEOUS AND VIGOROUS COLLECTION

REF: NEW DELHI 4376

SUMMARY: MORARJI DESAI'S NEW CABINET IS A HETEROGENEOUS
COLLECTION OF THE PARTIES AND GROUPS WHICH MAKE UP THE
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 04597 01 OF 02 011148Z

JANATA/CFD/AKALI DAL RULING FRONT. MINISTERS REPRESENT
MOST OF INDIA'S REGIONS, CASTE GROUPS AND RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES. DESPITE THE JANATA LOSSES IN THE SOUTH, DESAI HAS MANAGED
TO INCLUDE SEVERAL PROMINENT PERSONS
FROM THE FOUR SOUTHERN STATES. THE NUMBER OF PORTFOLIOS
ALLOCATED DOES NOT EXACTLY CORRESPOND TO PARTY STRENGTH
IN THE LOK SABHA. HOWEVER, THE PM'S STATED INTENTION TO

EXPAND THE CABINET AT A LATER STAGE WILL PROBABLY OPEN THE WAY TO MORE PRECISELY BALANCE PARTY STRENGTH WITH MINISTERIAL POSITIONS. MOST OF THE CABINET MEMBERS HAVE LONG BEEN ACTIVE IN POLITICS, AND SOME HAVE PREVIOUSLY HELD RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS AT THE CENTER OR IN THE STATES. MORE THEN TWO-THIRDS OF THEM HAD BEEN JAILED DURING THE EMERGENCY. IDEOLOGICALLY, THE CABINET IS GENERALLY CENTRIST, WITH "LEFTIST" AND "RIGHTISTS" MORE OR LESS IN BALANCE. ALL, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN RAISED IN THE TRADITION OF "INDIAN SOCIALISM". THE CABINET APPEARS TO BE A FAR MORE TALENTED ONE THAN ITS IMMEDIATE CONGRESS PREDECESSOR. THE PRESENCE OF STRONG PERSONALITIES AUGURS WELL FOR A RETURN TO A VIGOROUS CABINET SYSTEM. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT HOW DESAI'S CABINET WILL OPERATE, BUT THE GENERAL FEELING IS THAT DESAI WILL HAVE THE FINAL SAY IN POLICY MATTERS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN SELECTING THE 19 MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET, PRIME MINISTER DESAI EVIDENTLY SOUGHT TO STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS OF HIS MINISTERS. IN KEEPING WITH PAST PRACTICE, THE CABINET COMPRISES A REASONABLY FAIR AND BALANCED REPRESENTATION OF INDIA'S REGIONS, RELIGIONS, CASTE GROUPS AS WELL AS OF THE CONSTITUENT PARTS OF THE JANATA PARTY. BY FOUNDER-PARTY BREAKDOWN, THE CONGRESS (O) SECURED A LARGE SHARE OF THE PORTFOLIOS: THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND FIVE OTHER MINISTRIES (WORKS, HOUSING, SUPPLY AND REHABILITATION; LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS; EDUCATION, SOCIAL WELFARE AND CULTURE; ENERGY; PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND LABOR). ON THE OTHER HAND, THE JAN SANGH, WHICH COMPRISES

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 04597 01 OF 02 011148Z

THE SINGLE LARGEST BLOCK OF SEATS IN THE JANATA, RECEIVED ONLY THREE PORTFOLIOS, BUT THESE ARE RELATIVELY PRESTIGIOUS ONES (INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING; INDUSTRIES; EXTERNAL AFFAIRS). THE SOCIALIST PARTY ALSO HAS THREE CABINET SEATS (RAILWAYS; COMMUNICATIONS; TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION), EVEN THOUGH IT IS THE SMALLEST COMPONENT OF THE JANATA PARTY. FOUR PORTFOLIOS, ALL PRESTIGIOUS, WERE ALLOCATED TO THE BLD (HOME AFFAIRS; FINANCE; STEEL AND MINES; HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING). OF THE PARTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE JANATA PARTY, THE CFD RECEIVED TWO MINISTRIES (DEFENSE; AND CHEMICALS, FERTILIZERS AND PETROLEUM), WHILE THE AKALI DAL RECEIVED ONE--ALBEIT IMPORTANT--PORTFOLIO (AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION). ONE PORTFOLIO (COMMERCE, CIVIL SUPPLIES AND COOPERATION) WAS ALSO DISTRIBUTED TO THE SMALL BUT ARTICULATE GROUP OF CONGRESS REBELS WHO HAD JOINED THE JANATA. ONLY ONE MAJOR PORTFOLIO (SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT) REMAINS TO BE DISTRIBUTED. SOME OBSERVERS WERE SURPRISED THAT OTHER CONGRESS REBELS SUCH AS CHANDRA SHEKHAR AND RAM DHAN HAD NOT RECEIVED MINISTERIAL POSTS. HOWEVER, DESAI STATED EARLIER

THIS WEEK THAT HE INTENDED TO APPOINT OTHER MINISTERS, PRESUMABLY AT THE MINISTER OF STATE LEVEL, SUBSEQUENTLY. WHEN THE CABINET IS EXPANDED, THE CONGRESS REBELS (WHO HAD COMPRISED THE "YOUNG TURK" GROUP IN THE LATE 1960'S) MAY FIND MINISTERIAL POSITIONS. IN ANY EVENT, THE PM HAS SAID THAT HE WANTS A COMPACT CABINET, AND THE GENERAL SPECULATION IS THAT IT WILL NOT EXCEED 40 MEMBERS, AS OPPOSED TO THE 62 IN MRS. GANDHI'S CABINET.

2. THE LEADERS OF THREE OF THE FOUR PREDECESSOR PARTIES WITHIN JANATA WERE INCLUDED IN THE CABINET, AS WAS CFD CHAIRMAN JAGJIVAN RAM. ONLY CONGRESS (O) PRESIDENT ASHOKA MEHTA FAILED TO RECEIVE A PORTFOLIO, PERHAPS DUE TO HIS FAILING HEALTH.

3. REGIONALLY, THE CABINET IS A FAIRLY REPRESENTATIVE MIX, ALTHOUGH AS IN THE PAST UP HAS THE LARGEST NUMBER OF CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 NEW DE 04597 01 OF 02 011148Z

MINISTERS, FOUR. THE SOUTH POSED A PROBLEM FOR THE PM IN THAT CONGRESS AND ALLIES HAD WON VIRTUALLY ALL THE SEATS. STILL, CONGRESS (O) LEADER P. RAMACHANDRAN REPRESENTS TAMIL NADU IN THE CABINET. TWO OTHER MINISTERS, GEORGE FERNANDES AND RAVINDRA VERMA, WERE ELECTED FROM BIHAR BUT ORIGINALLY HAIL FROM KARNATAKA AND KERALA RESPECTIVELY. N. SANJIVE REDDY WAS THE SOLE JANATA WINNER FROM ANDHRA PRADESH, AND ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT INDUCTED INTO THE CABINET, HE WAS ELECTED TO AN EVEN MORE PRESTIGIOUS POSITION AS SPEAKER OF THE LOK SABHA.

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 04597 02 OF 02 311708Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
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PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 SSC-01 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AGRE-00
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O 311403Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2306
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 4597

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

4. THE CABINET IS ALSO BALANCED ON COMMUNAL AND CASTE GROUNDS:
IT INCLUDES A MUSLIM (SIKANDER BAKHT), A SIKH (PRAKASH SINGH
BADAL), A CHRISTIAN (GEORGE FERNANDES) AND A HARIJAN
(JAGJIVAN RAM). OTHER CASTES, PARTICULARLY THE LOWER ONES,
ARE REPRESENTED, BUT AS USUAL BRAHMINS PREDOMINATE. APART
FROM THE PM, THERE ARE AT LEAST FIVE OTHER BRAHMINS IN THE
CABINET.

5. MOST OF THE MINISTERS HAVE LONG BEEN ACTIVE IN POLITICS.
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 04597 02 OF 02 311708Z

SIX BEGAN THEIR CAREERS AS LAWYERS BEFORE ENTERING
PARTY POLITICS. OTHERS CAME FROM MORE DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS,
RANGING FROM ACADEMIC PURSUITS TO BIG BUSINESS. ELEVEN OF
THE MINISTERS ARE NEW TO MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY, ALTHOUGH
SEVERAL OTHERS, SUCH AS PRIME MINISTER DESAI, RAM, CHARAN
SINGH AND BAHUGUNA, HAVE HELD SENIOR POSITIONS
EITHER IN THE GOI OR AS CHIEF MINISTERS. FOURTEEN OF THE
TWENTY MINISTERS WERE DETAINED UNDER MISA AT ONE TIME
OR ANOTHER DURING THE EMERGENCY.

6. IN IDEOLOGICAL TERMS, THE CABINET AS A WHOLE MAY BEST
BE DESCRIBED AS BROADLY CENTRIST, WITH THE USUAL OBLIGATORY
TOUCHES OF "INDIAN SOCIALISM". FIVE MINISTERS HAVE LONG
BEEN ASSOCIATED EITHER WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY OR THE PRAJA
SOCIALIST PARTY, YET THESE "LEFTISTS" ARE ANTI-IMPERIALIST
AND BELONG TO THE TRADITION OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY. DESAI,
CHARAN SINGH AND L.K. ADVANI ARE GENERALLY DESCRIBED AS
SLIGHTLY RIGHT OF CENTER, WHILE FINANCE MINISTER PATEL HAS
LONG STOOD FOR FREE ENTERPRISE AND ECONOMIC LIBERALISM.
H.N. BAHUGUNA IS SOMETHING OF A POLITICAL
CHAMELEON. HE IS AN AVOWED "PROGRESSIVE" AND HAD CLOSE LINKS

WITH THE CPI WHEN HE WAS CHIEF MINISTER OF UP. NONETHELESS, ALTHOUGH HE IS CERTAINLY A "LEFTIST" IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS CABINET, BAHUGUNA HAS USUALLY TEMPERED HIS IDEOLOGY TO KEEP IN TUNE WITH THE PREVAILING WIND AND IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE DOING SO. AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, NONE OF THE MINISTERS HAS A COMMUNIST BACKGROUND OR ANY SPECIAL SYMPATHIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION. WHILE CHIEF MINISTER, BAHUGUNA WAS CONSIDERED FRIENDLY WITH THE SOVIETS, BUT THIS MUST BE VIEWED IN THE CONTEXT OF INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS DURING MRS. GANDHI'S REGIME.

7. COMMENT: OVERALL, DESAI'S CABINET IS A HETEROGENEOUS COLLECTION OF THE DIVERSE GROUPS WHICH FORM THE JANATA PARTY AND ITS CFD/AKALI DAL ALLIES. IN THIS SENSE, IT IS BROADLY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RULING FRONT. A
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 04597 02 OF 02 311708Z

SENIOR JANATA LEADER HAS TOLD US THAT DESAI HAS SELECTED HIS MINISTERS MOSTLY ON THE BASIS OF HIS OWN PERSONAL PREFERENCES. IN TERMS OF TALENT AND CAPABILITIES, THE CABINET IS CERTAINLY A STRONGER ONE THAN THOSE IN THE LATTER YEARS OF MRS. GANDHI'S RULE. H. M. PATEL IS RESPECTED IN THE FINANCIAL FIELD, WHILE VAJPAYEE HAS A REPUTATION FOR COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. SENIOR MEA OFFICIALS

ARE PLEASED WITH VAJPAYEE'S APPOINTMENT, SAYING THAT HE WAS ONE OF THE THREE OR FOUR JANATA/CFD LEADERS BEST SUITED FOR THE JOB. JAGJIVAN RAM HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF EVERY GOI CABINET SINCE INDEPENDENCE AND IN THE EARLY 1970'S EARNED GOOD MARKS AT DEFENSE, TO WHICH HE NOW RETURNS. BAHUGUNA, WAS GENERALLY REGARDED AS PERHAPS THE MOST ABLE CHIEF MINISTER UP HAS HAD. THE CABINET CONTAINS A NUMBER OF STRONG AND OUTSPOKEN PERSONALITIES, NOTABLY CHARAN SINGH, GEORGE FERNANDES, RAJ NARAIN, AND THE PM HIMSELF, WHO ARE LIKELY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES FORCEFULLY. THE PRESENCE OF SUCH STRONG FIGURES COULD PORTEND A VIGOROUS AND DYNAMIC CABINET SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE COMING MONTHS.

8. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT HOW DESAI'S CABINET WILL OPERATE AS IT BEGINS TO CONFRONT THE REALITIES OF POWER AND POLICY-MAKING. SOME OBSERVERS FEAR THAT THE RECENT STRUGGLE OVER PORTFOLIOS AND PRECEDENCE MAY PRESAGE FAR MORE SERIOUS TUSSELS AMONG THE MINISTRY'S DESPERATE ELEMENTS. STRONG CENTRIFUGAL FORCES WILL CERTAINLY BE ACTIVE. STILL, AS WE POINTED OUT IN NEW DELHI 4382, PUBLIC PRESSURE APPARENTLY PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN RESOLVING THE FIRST CRISES. JANATA LEADER KRISHNA KANT HAS TOLD US THAT IF THE PEOPLE DEMONSTRATED THEIR DESIRE THAT THE REGIME HOLD TOGETHER TO KEEP THE CONGRESS

OUT OF POWER, THE COALITION MEMBERS WOULD RESPOND
ACCORDINGLY. ANOTHER SOURCE BELIEVES THAT FOR
THE MOMENT AT LEAST, THE NEW MINISTERS
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PAGE 04 NEW DE 04597 02 OF 02 311708Z

WILL CONFINE THEIR ARGUMENTS OVER POLICY TO THE
PRIVACY OF THE CABINET ROOM AND ONCE HAVING MADE
THEIR POINTS THEY WILL BOW TO THE WISHES OF MORARJI DESAI,
THE OCTOGENARIAN FATHER-FIGURE. HIS
GREATEST TEST AS A LEADER IS YET TO COME.
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Message Attributes

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